

Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital Procedure

Elopement/Late Return

Revised: X

Date: 04/07/14

Definitions:

“Elopement” means that a patient has left the Hospital or the company of staff without authorization.

“Elopement Status” means that Hospital, State, and law enforcement officials have been notified that a patient has left the Hospital without authorization.

“Late Return” means that a patient who has been authorized to leave the unit has failed to return to the unit within 15 minutes of the patient’s scheduled time of return.

“Search for the patient” means a search of the Hospital by Hospital staff to locate a missing patient.

“Unscheduled Return” means a return following revocation of a patient’s authorization to leave the unit.

I. Attempted Elopement from a Secure Area

If a patient attempts to elope from a staff-monitored secure area (the yard or unit) treatment staff shall act to prevent the elopement if this can be done safely.

II. Elopement from VPCH

- A. When a patient cannot be found or the patient is late for a scheduled return, the Nursing Supervisor shall initiate a search for the patient.
- B. The Nursing Supervisor shall assign staff to look for the missing patient within the Hospital and the Hospital grounds (parking lot and building).
- C. If staff is unable to locate a patient within 15 minutes, the Nursing Supervisor or designee shall place the patient on elopement status and notify the physician and the on call physician.
- D. Staff shall immediately place a patient on elopement status when they have information that leads them to reasonably believe that the patient has in fact eloped.
- E. If a decision to place the patient on elopement status is made, the Nursing Supervisor or designee will immediately notify the Admissions Office and provide that office with the following information (to complete Report Form for Elopements):
 - 1. Physically Identifying Information: name, age, sex, height, weight, color of eyes and hair, what the patient was wearing when last seen.
 - 2. Other Pertinent Information: whether the patient is dangerous to himself/herself or others.
- F. If the patient is found outside of the secure area of the hospital, the staff member(s) shall encourage the patient to return. If the patient fails to return to the hospital, the staff member(s) shall follow the patient, and contact the Admissions office to inform them of the patient’s current location (*See section V. Elopement Status Notifications*).

III. Elopement From Individual or Group Outings or Staff Transport

- A. Every staff member who escorts an individual patient or a group of patients off the unit will carry a cell phone.

- B. Prior to leaving the unit, staff will notify Admissions and inform them which cell phone they have.
- C. Staff must supervise patients individually or in a group consistent with the Escort Policy.
- D. If a patient elopes and staff are aware, a staff member shall remain with the patient wherever they go so there are “eyes on” at all times.
- E. Call 911 via cell phone immediately and provide the 911 operator with as much of the following information as possible:
 - 1. the patient’s name and approximate age;
 - 2. the patient’s height, weight, eye color, hair color, and any distinguishing marks;
 - 3. a description of the patient’s clothing;
 - 4. when and where the patient was last seen;
 - 5. a description of the patient’s behavior when last seen;
 - 6. whether the patient was on foot or entered a vehicle. If the patient entered a vehicle, provide a description of the vehicle and state which direction the patient was traveling; and
 - 7. inform the 911 operator that the VPCH Admissions Office will be the contact point for the Hospital and that the Admissions Office will contact the 911 operator to provide additional information.
- B. After providing the 911 operator with the above information, the staff person will immediately call Admissions (888-6777).

IV. Elopement Status Notifications

- C. **Elopement Status Notifications.** When a patient elopes, the Admissions Office will notify the following people in the order listed below:

- 1. Morristown Police. Admission staff shall notify law enforcement of a patient elopement by telephone and facsimile transmission. Admission staff shall inform the dispatcher answering the call and give as much information as possible.
- 2. VPCH Chief Executive Officer or his/her designee;
- 3. The Commissioner for the Department of Mental Health
- 4. The VPCH Medical Director or his/her designee, and the patient’s attending physician;
- 5. The patient’s family, significant others, and advance directive agent, if the patient has authorized the disclosure of protected health information to these individuals;
- 6. The patient’s guardian;
- 7. If the patient eloped from the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital, inform those neighbors who requested to be included on the Neighbor Notification List by following the Guidelines for Notifying Neighbors.

Neighbors notified should simply be told that a patient elopement has occurred and is being addressed. Neighbors should be encouraged to direct further questions to the Morristown Police Department.
- 8. Department of Corrections, when indicated.

9. Adult Protective Services (via facsimile transmission).
10. If applicable, Admissions will follow the Duty to Warn and/or Mandatory Reporting policies.
11. Any calls about patients on elopement status are directed to the Admissions Office. The Admissions technician will record all relevant information in the progress notes section of the patient's medical record.

B. Notification of Patient Death or Serious Injury Associated with Elopement. Any patient death or serious injury associated with an elopement must be reported to the Patient Safety and Surveillance Improvement System at:

Vermont Program for Quality in Healthcare
132 Main Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05602
1- 802-229-2152

V. Documentation.

1. The Nursing Supervisor or designee shall ensure that an adverse event report is made in the VPCH event reporting system as indicated in the *Event Reporting Procedure*. The Nursing Supervisor or designee will also ensure that a progress note with a complete description of the event is completed.
2. The Nursing Supervisor must bring the patient's medical record to the Admissions Office from the patient's unit as soon as possible after a patient has been placed on elopement status.
3. The Admissions Office will complete the Report Form for Elopements and fax the form to the Morristown Police, Middlesex Barracks or other law enforcement agency as directed by the Middlesex Barracks. The form is kept on file in the Admissions Office.
4. The Chief Executive Officer, the Medical Director, and the Director of Nursing shall initiate a review of elopements on the following business day. The review shall include, but shall not be limited to the level of supervision that was authorized and the supervision that staff actually provided.

VI. Return from Elopement Status. When a patient returns from elopement status:

- A. The attending physician or on-call physician will see the patient in the Admissions Office and the physician will enter a note in the patient's medical record. The patient will be searched pursuant to the *Restricted Item and Search Policy and Procedure*.
- B. The Admissions technician shall inform all of the people who were notified of the elopement that the patient has been returned to VPCH.
- C. The Admissions Office will complete the appropriate section of the Elopement Form, NS-87.

VII. Elopement to Another State

When an eloped patient is apprehended in another state, and unless otherwise clinically indicated, the patient shall be returned to Vermont through the interstate compact agreement.

VIII. Unscheduled Return of Patients on Short Visits.

An attending or covering physician may have a patient immediately returned from a pass or short-visit by revoking the patient's authorization to be away from the hospital and ordering an unscheduled return of the patient. The physician will order an unscheduled return of the patient by notifying Admissions that the patient is no longer authorized to be away from the hospital. The physician shall order the patient's return by the least restrictive means necessary for the safety of the patient and others. The physician's determination regarding the type of transportation should be documented in a physician's order and a progress note.

A. Transportation for an unscheduled return by a non-law enforcement transportation provider.

The physician may specify the use of a non-law enforcement transportation provider if the information available to the physician establishes that despite the fact that the patient needs to be returned to the Hospital, the patient could be safely transported without the use of restraints or significant supervision, and such transportation would not present a danger to the patient or others.

B. Transportation for an unscheduled return by law enforcement.

The physician may specify the use of law enforcement personnel to return the patient if the physician has determined that the use of a less restrictive transport method would present a risk of physical harm to the patient and/or to others by elopement or other behaviors. The physician must document the patient's risk(s) and the necessity of using law enforcement in a physician's order and progress note.

VIII. Terminating Elopement Status

All patients not requiring court-ordered discharge hearings and who have been on elopement status for more than six months shall, with the approval of the Commissioner for the Department of Mental Health, be administratively discharged from the care and custody of VPCH. The VPCH Admissions Office shall promptly notify law enforcement of the patient's discharge.

Approved by VPCH Policy Committee	Approval Date: April 7, 2014
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